

## HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) 12-year review: Summary Report (January 2024)

### **Context**

The University of Huddersfield employs just over 2000 academic, research and professional and support services staff, based across five academic schools: Human & Health Sciences, Computing & Engineering, Business, Education & Law, Arts & Humanities and Applied Sciences, and a number of Service Directorates. The University first received the European HR Excellence in Research Award (HREiR) in 2011 and received renewal at subsequent reviews in 2013, 2015, 2017, 2019 (awarded 2020) and 2022. Since 2011 the successive action plans have sought to improve the development of and the support for our staff whose primary responsibility is to conduct research.

The 'Innovative' aim within our overall Strategy Map has a specific research focus and the University supports the strategic development of research by encouraging our researchers to form multidisciplinary concentrations of research excellence in our institutes and research centres. This is underpinned by the University's Areas of Strategic Importance; strategic themes which create focus for the development of research portfolio in four broad areas: Culture, Health and Wellbeing, Productivity, Sustainability and Equality, Cohesion and Security.

The University currently employs 142 research-only staff. This group includes Research Assistants, Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows and these staff are usually supported by external research grant and contract funding. The number of this group has increased over the last two years with now over a third on permanent or indefinite contracts. We continually review the numbers of our research staff on fixed term contracts and where further extensions to contracts are requested, Human Resources (HR) ensures that there is an objective justification for the extension and assesses whether continuation of a fixed term contract is appropriate or whether individuals should be transferred to indefinite or permanent contracts. This has continued to be a focus for the HR team over the last two years, working together with the research leaders and Associate Deans – Research, Innovation, Knowledge & Enterprise.

At the University, our academic staff employed on a contract of more than 0.5FTE are required to be qualified to doctoral level and undertake research and scholarly activity. Once PhD qualified, they have a 'significant responsibility' for research. Our primary target audience therefore for the Research Development Concordat is c.700 academic members of staff and 142 research-only staff, who are all identified as full members of one of the University's research centres. Of this target group, 44% are identified as early career researchers, defined in line with UKRI as within eight years of the award of their PhD or six years of their first academic appointment.

### **Internal Evaluation**

Internal evaluation has been overseen by the University Research and Careers Oversight Group (URCOG). URCOG meets quarterly and includes representation from Research, Innovation, Knowledge & Enterprise (RIKE), representatives from the five Academic Schools, the Dean of the Graduate School, HR and members of our Research community including an Early Career Researcher (ECR), and Postgraduate Researcher (PGR).

Both the review of progress against actions outlined in our current HREiR Action Plan (2022-24) and the development for the forward-looking Action Plan (2024-27) have been informed by engaging directly with the research population through various channels, including the following:

- Progress against the previous actions (2022-24) has been a substantial agenda item at each URCOG meeting.
- CEDARS survey 2023 (16% response rate) – analysis of the quantitative data has taken place and of qualitative data is in progress, highlighting key areas for further analysis and discussion. Whilst our overall CEDARS response rate was lower than previously (potentially due to organisational change and restructure at the time of the survey), our responses came from staff at different career stages, with a variety of contractual arrangements and coverage from our five academic schools. Institution wide data has been shared at URCOG and is complemented by additional sources of data and feedback.
- Results of the University wide Staff Engagement Survey (2022 response rate: 44% research-only staff and 68% academic staff) have been shared with URCOG.
- Evaluation feedback from researcher development activities to help identify their impact and seeking opportunities to hear directly from researchers about their experiences (for example engagement with participants on our research team leadership programmes).

Progress has continued to be informally evaluated via a smaller working group that was established in January 2019. This working group includes colleagues from RIKE and HR and meets regularly to assess progress against the current Action Plan, receive updates from across the institution on activities to support researchers and coordinate further initiatives to support our researcher community. The group use a RAG rating scheme to monitor and maintain momentum in all areas of the action plan.

### **Governance Structure**

Oversight of the Researcher Development Concordat Action Plans and the HREiR progress lies with the University Research and Careers Oversight Group (URCOG). URCOG is chaired by the Director of Human Resources and reports to the University Research Committee (URC) which in turn reports to University Council. Our Pro Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation, Knowledge & Enterprise chairs the University Research Committee and is also a member of University Council and has the ultimate responsibility for the HREiR action plan. URC meets three times per year and the Chair of URCOG attends and provides an update on the action plan. The formal minutes of the meetings are shared widely and available to our staff which ensures transparency, enhances engagement and increases awareness of activities. An annual report on the implementation of the Concordat and HREiR progress is provided to URC.

The Concordat and the HREiR action plans are embedded in the EDI charter mark work as overseen by the University's EDI team in HR. URCOG ensure that the actions are aligned with the actions for the other charter marks, in particular Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter (REC). Representatives from the central Research and Innovation Culture team are active members of the University's Equality, Diversity, Inclusion Enhancement Committee and part of the Athena SWAN and REC self-assessment teams.

### **Past Progress and Achievements**

Since the last review, the University of Huddersfield's main focus, recognising the impact of the pandemic, has been on supporting the wellbeing and mental health of our research staff and students, providing career development sessions for our research staff and rationalising the training we provide to this group of staff and students. In some areas progress has not moved as swiftly as anticipated; this has been addressed recently with a refocus of the support and provision within RIKE for academic staff and all PGR students being the responsibility of the Graduate School. The Graduate School has worked

closely with the Deputy Head of Careers, with extensive input and consultation in the preparation of materials from PGR students. Significant achievements in the past two years include:

- The continued review and development of the network of Mental Health First Aiders through training and peer support.
- The development of the People and Organisational Development theme on Wellbeing to include several new and impactful courses and resources to support researchers' positive wellbeing and mental health.
- Increased awareness and monitoring of the overall use of our Confidential Wellbeing Support for staff (online wellbeing support tool).
- Continued accreditation of the National Wellbeing Charter and the Mental Health Charter.
- The introduction of mandatory Diversity in the Workplace and Unconscious Bias online training modules for all managers of research staff.
- Raised awareness for leadership development opportunities amongst our research staff for them to develop their self-awareness and leadership skills.
- Development and implementation of the Research Team Leadership Programme and Principal Investigator Leadership Development Programme in association with Advance HE. These programmes were specifically for our researchers, complementing wider CMI provision.
- A refocussing of the PGR Induction programme.
- The introduction of PGR focussed weeks that provide support and training and development opportunities around specific themes including 'The Informed Researcher'.
- Review and refocus of the induction process for our research staff.
- The establishment of an ECR network (July 2023) within the School of Computing and Engineering, and dedicated funding to support ECR led activities including support for intra-departmental ECR led research proposals and workshops.

### **Strategic Objectives and Implementation Plan**

At Huddersfield we have demonstrated a commitment to investing in the people who carry out world-class research and to supporting those who are early in their careers. Our commitment to building the next generation of researchers is demonstrated through the increasing size of our postgraduate research community and engagement in the development of doctoral training centres. Our staff are supported throughout their careers to produce research outputs at the highest levels and use these outputs to achieve their personal goals and to contribute to the ambitions of the University's research strategy. Staff receive collegial support, collaboration and mentoring and are encouraged to seek additional provision as they think essential to achieving their goals. Developing and keeping our talent is the core of vitality and sustainability, and activity around the development, retention and promotion of excellent researchers, in line with the *Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers*, is at the forefront of the University's research strategy. We recognise the efforts and contributions of our early career researchers and through our HREiR action plan ensure that effective support is in place to enable them to make progress towards achieving their goals and to contribute to the strategy. We make further efforts to ensure that effective training and development opportunities that are tailored to the specific needs of our researchers are available regardless of career stage, appointment type or working pattern.

Our aim over the next three years is to further embed some of the existing initiatives (for example around engagement and wellbeing and mental health) that have been developed over the previous action plan. We have also identified some key new areas of focus.

### To further embed existing initiatives

We have used the results from CEDARS as a key measure to identify our progress against key actions on our previous action plan. However, we recognise that we need to build on these foundations, particularly around promoting and embedding the principles of the Concordat and providing our researchers with a range of engagement and development opportunities.

### Areas of focus

We have also used CEDARS, together with input from our researchers and URGOG members to identify broad areas of focus from our obligations within the Researcher Development Concordat for our forward-looking action plan. Our priorities reflect our wider University strategy and direction:

#### **Awareness and engagement** – *building on our previous work with a focus on engagement*

Some of the key actions within this area will include:

- Establishing a university-wide researcher network; encouraging connection and a wider inclusive research culture. This will be open to all researchers regardless of career stage, appointment type or working pattern.
- Proposal for a University-wide research event, incorporating Huddersfield research awards.

#### **Wellbeing and mental health** – *a continued focus on the wellbeing and mental health of researchers*

Some of the key actions within this area will include:

- Managers of our researchers to complete 'Having wellbeing conversations for people managers' eLearning module and all our researchers to be enrolled on a mandatory eLearning module 'Managing your own self-care and wellbeing.'
- Re-establishing the University workload allocation working group, including both research and academic staff, to support workload management and wellbeing and mental health.

#### **Championing professional development** – *enhancing researcher development opportunities and support*

Some of the key actions within this area will include:

- Piloting a university-wide ECR mentoring scheme during the academic year 2023-24, supporting ECRs with different aspects of their professional and career development.
- Completing the first round of the RIKE Professional Practitioner Programme.
- Making good use of sector best practice resources (e.g. Prosper) to support researcher development.